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Atari Online News, Etc.
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-* McAfee Debuts Anti-Spyware! *-
-* Moratorium On Web Taxes Advances! *-
-* Move Over Internet Explorer, Firefox Here! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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It's definitely much too early. It's not even Thanksgiving yet, and we had some snow this past week. No, not your little flurry to remind us that winter is getting near, but about four inches of the white stuff. I haven't even finished cleaning up all of the leaves in the yard yet! I'm not ready for winter yet - definitely! Fortunately, the temperatures have warmed up a little bit so perhaps the snow will be melted by the weekend, and I can get them cleaned up before the snow really starts to fly, and stick around.

If you're fortunate to live in the United States, then you'll be celebrating Thanksgiving next week. This has to be one of my most favorite holidays. No, not due to its historical beginnings - although that is certainly important. I enjoy it because of the traditional Thanksgiving fare. I really enjoy cooking a turkey and all of the fixings (yes, I do cook!!). It's also a holiday when family and friends usually get together for a day of giving thanks, and enjoying one another's company. It's a tradition that transcends religious beliefs and ethnic cultures. It's an American tradition that most celebrate. Did I say that I really love a home-cooked turkey?! Anyway, I'm really looking forward to next week's feast. All of us here at A-ONE hope that you and your family also enjoy the holiday.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, the holidays are creeping up on us quickly. Thanksgiving Day is this coming week here in the states, and Christmas is only 4 and a half weeks after that. Did you notice that they started holiday commercials WAY early this year? I guess I'm just old fashioned, but I don't like it.

I know that a lot of you have heard me talk about this before, but I'd like to mention to you that, even though they aren't front page news

anymore, there are still people who are homeless or simply down on their luck and need a little help. As the commercial used to say, I'm not talking about a hand-out. I'm talking about a hand UP.

Drop a couple of bucks or a turkey or some canned goods off at the local homeless shelter or soup kitchen. It's not a life-long commitment, and let's face it, you'd never miss what you'd be donating. If you're of a mind to, most places also need warm bodies to help out.

I've told this story before, and some of you are probably tired of hearing about it, but it made an impression on me, so I'm just trying to pass it on...

One of my heroes has always been Harry Chapin. You know the guy... Taxi? Cat's in the Cradle? Yeah, that's him. He was always big into helping out the less fortunate. He donated half of everything he made every year to those less fortunate.

I saw him in concert several times, and once, during intermission, I had him autograph an "EVERY Year is World Hunger Year" Tee-shirt. He was great with the fans. He genuinely loved the fans, and we all returned it gladly. While he was signing my tee, I told him that I'd donated some foodstuffs to the local soup kitchen for the holidays. He kind of patted me on the head, but reminded me in no uncertain terms that there are always people in need, not just during the holidays. He was right, but in the years since he "dope-smacked" me, I've come to another realization on my own... It's not just the homeless that need help.

Every damned one of us, at one time or another, could use a little help. Not necessarily food or shelter.. sometimes those are the easy things to provide... but there are certain key times in all our lives when we could use a kind word or some encouragement or even just an understanding nod. I'm constantly amazed at the number of people who seem to have forgotten that. Especially since it's such a simple thing.

Remember the talk, during an election a dozen years ago, about the "Thousand Points of Light"? I made a joke at the time about "41's" thousand points of light being the glow in the eyes of the Fortune 500. Yeah, I know, I'm a real stinker sometimes. The fact of the matter is that we need more than a thousand points of light. We need 290 MILLION points of light. That's right, each and every one of us. I don't care who you are, or how good or bad you think you're doing or where your place is in the grand scheme of things (if there really is such a thing). Each and every one of us has the ability to do some good. Some are so hard and hollow by now that they can only do it with money, but for those of us who DIDN'T just get re-elected, there are dozens of chances every day to make a little difference. All you have to do is look around you for a moment. It could be something like donating blood, or it could be as simple as taking a second to give someone a little encouragement, but there are lots of chances all around us every day.

So donate some food, money or time if you can, but don't forget a little bit of actual kindness too. You know what I'm talking about... 'Tis the season' and all that stuff. <g>

Now let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

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'Dark Willow' asks for help with NVDI and his Nova card:

"OK, I have just got a Nova VME card for my TT, which I wan tot use with the ET4000. Alas the manual is in German so any basic info is appreciated on how to get it all set up.

Also I have NVDI 4, which is without ET4000 support. Do the drivers supplied with the Nova make NVDI support unnecessary or do I have to upgrade that anyway? If so does anyone know how much the upgrade costs?"

Lonny Pursell tells Dark Willow:

"You can use the Nova in these various arrangements:

1) Just the Nova driver, but then you have no vector font support

2) Nova driver with speedo gdos, then you get the vector font support

3) Nova driver + nvdi et4000, same as #2, but faster, plus you get offscreen bitmap support

I no longer have the Nova, swapped it for a crazydots 2 card so I don't recall the exact auto folder order and so forth. However you do have to disable the *.sys drivers in one of the nvdi folders for them to work together. No idea about the cost either."

Willow replies:

"I managed to work out the manual enough to get the auto folder file order and have arranged all files so they are in order, and that all the files from the AUTO and DATA-TT folders on disk were present along with a CPX that allows some kind of config options. However still no joy. When booting a screen with coloured block (corrupted letters maybe?) and 2 bombs appears, this can be cleared by pressing a key that brings up an auto program that has several menu options, one which allows you to select a screen resolution and colour depth. Which ever option I select ultimately does nothing and the machine boots as normal giving normal TT resolutions on the original VGA port. I can't get any signal at all through the graphics card VGA port. The CPX utility just says "graphics card not installed!" (in german) but I've disconnected and reconnected it to the VME several times and it's definitely connected up correctly."

Mark Duckworth tells Willow:

"I'm almost 100% sure an ET4000 card will not work with the Nova board. nova's drivers are explicitly for Mach32 or Mach64. Aka Nova, and SuperNova. In fact, you very well could have fried the GAL's on your VME board if the ET4000 doesn't play nicely with the wiring arrangement.

The NOVA is NOT A UNIVERSAL ISA ADAPTER! It is a specifically tailored solution to a single type of video card. ATI Mach32 or 64. Same with EtherNEC. Just because I have an ISA slot hanging off my ROM port

doesn’t mean I can put a video card on it and have it work!

Now I COULD be wrong here. But everything I have EVER READ about the Nova suggests that I am right. Oh yeah, and I have one!

Jo Even Skarstein tells Mark:

"There is an ET4000 version of the NOVA, called (surprise!) Nova ET4000."

Willow tells Jo Even:

"Yes, the version I have is for the standard 1mb ET4000 board. I did check that before I brought, as I already had the ET4000 graphics card and didn’t want to get a new card."

Lonny adds:

"He never said he plugged any old card on to it. That is an assumption. However my assumption is he acquired it with the proper card included. I do not recall them ever being sold minus the video card.

I had a low end Nova, they made several versions. Pretty sure it was et4000, opened it up an looked once, it was Tseng Laboratories. Ozk has the my old Nova setup.

Found several pages on the web referring to Nova with et4000:
The comp.sys.atari.st "Simplified" FAQ (Hardware)
MegaST/MegaSTe/TT/Falcon: The Nova Graphics Board is a 24-bit graphics board based on the Tseng ET4000 graphics chip. It comes in 3 different versions for the Megabus, VME and PDS versions. Nova uses standard SVGA monitors for display. The Falcon version can only be used with 4MB machines. Now marketed by Homa Systems House."

’Chris’ asks about a replacement hard drive for his Falcon:

"My Falcon IDE drive is on the way out. It keeps getting stuck on boot up. Can anyone recommend a source for a new one? How do I get it boot up from an external drive?"

Jo Even Skarstein tells Chris:

"You can use virtually any IDE drive, but unless you use MiNT or MagiC (and I believe you need HD-Driver as well) you can only use the first 2Gb.

[You boot from an external drive] by installing the hard disk driver on the external drive and removing it from the internal drive."

Jim DeClercq asks for info about a 50 pin Centronix connector:

"I have a small problem. I have a bunch of new, used drives that do not have a jumper to set for bus power, so I have an unpowered bus which does not work. My TT does have pin 25 not connected, but connecting it will do nothing because both the DB-25 to C-50 cables I own have no connection

from the DB-25 end on pin 25.

One convenient place to supply bus power is in an external box, of which I have several. These places have a C-50 external connector, and 50-way ribbon cable leading to a 50-pin end of an appropriate adapter for the drive I have.

Does anyone have, or can anyone tell me where I have not looked, for pinouts of either the C-50 connector, or the signal names of a 50 pin drive connector? I need to find a place to put bus power into the bus, for modern drives that no longer do that.

Yes, I have tried to trace the cables I have, but that does not give me the information I need."

Rory McMahon replies with a number of links:

"Try
http://www.nullmodem.com/Centronics.htm
http://teryx.bobdbob.com/~protius/pinouts/
http://pinouts.ru/data/pin_ScsiExternalCentronics50Diff.shtml
http://invalid.ed.ntnu.no/~kamben/hwb/menu_Connector.html

Hope one of these will help..."

Jim tells Rory:

"Many thanks. The very first one produced exactly what I was looking for. I will write these addresses in my little orange (not black) book, so I will never have to ask again. As far as I can tell, Google does not like me, or at least did not place these sites in any low-numbered page where I looked for them.

And, when I looked again for cs-electronics, who have adapters needed for putting a SCA drive on the end of a 50-pin cable, google did not find it, or I did not properly tell it where to look.

Maybe it can outthink me, but sometimes I wish it would not try. "

Carey Christenson asks for info on accelerators:

"I have a Falcon 030 (Actually its a MK II needs repaired) and wondering what sort of accelerators are available for a Falcon computer. As ALL of you know I have a Falcon 030 with a 72 mhz CT60 and a 25 mhz system bus but I want to have a decently fast computer as a backup without all the cost just in case something happened to my CT60ed falcon and would have to send it back to Rodolphe. I seem to remember a POWER UP 2 Accelerator awhile back, is this still available?? I also have a chance to get a MEGA STe. I noticed there are PAK030 upgrades on Mega STe are these still available and if so where??? Which would be more cost effective in upgrading??? Any Graphic Cards available for the MEGA STe as well?? I have an Eclipse which I am not using on my CT60 since the SUPERVIDEL will be coming soon enough that I figured why bother with the hassle of the Eclipse and the CT60 both."

’Coda’ tells Carey:

"There are probably companies like system solutions in the UK that might have a powerup2 left, but why bother buying one for the huge amount of cash they will ask, cos you could build your own accelerator quite easily if you have a soldering iron and know how to use it. Its not rocket science. Have a look at http://atari.nvg.org/cpu_accel/ which is a bit of a convoluted doc, but read it through a couple of times and you have a BUS accelerator. All the powerup2 does is take the 32mhz system clock and pump it straight to the CPU instead of the 16mhz from the combel, and you can switch between them using the ACIA, it does not accelerate the BUS at all. With the home built bus accelerator and a good ram card you will have a 25mhz bus, and then a home built CPU accelerator will give you a 32mhz CPU."

Ronald Hall asks about software for his CT60:

"Guys, I'm a tad bit confused about something. I've got the CT60 working, NVDI is up, etc, etc,...but what or where is the other software that I keep seeing mentioned in the newsgroup?

I downloaded a file from Rodophes' site, but it had things like a modified CPX, ACCs, etc,...

What AUTO folder programs should I have in there? Right now its only:

Extendos
NVDI
MINT

So what and where am I missing stuff?"

Greg Goodwin tells Ronald:

"What you have will work, just like a plain devil's food cake can be called "dessert". Now, it's time for the "frosting".

Add STing for a TCP/IP stack, a half dozen accessories and .cpx modules for spice, and a nice desktop for visual appeal. The sky's the limit. What do you want your computer to be able to do?"

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Nintendo DS This Weekend!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Atari 'Flashback' Soon!
New 'Need for Speed'!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Nintendo Prepares Weekend Launch of New Handheld

A generation of children grew up playing Nintendo Co. Ltd.'s Game Boy handheld video game system, and now that they've grown up, Nintendo has a new toy for them.

The Nintendo DS handheld launches on Sunday and is like no other portable gaming system before it - two screens (one of them touch-sensitive), two slots for different types of game cartridges, two kinds of wireless connections, and a number of other bells and whistles that distinguish it from the crowd.

The target market is the more sophisticated game player, who has a bit more disposable income and a bit more interest in complex play than the younger children who have made the Game Boy line a global success.

Those in the industry who have tested the DS are generally positive on both the technology and its potential for new kinds of games, but say it will be a few months at least before there are actually games on the market that use the new technology.

"Right now it seems like more of a bundle of good ideas rather than actual, practical 'Yeah I have to own this to play this particular game,"' said Mark MacDonald, executive editor of Electronic Gaming Monthly.

"It's got all these really neat ideas (but) I don't think so far any of the games have really pulled all this together."

Fans do not seem to care much about the details - they want the new 'new thing' - now. Nintendo expects to sell about 1 million units between the Sunday launch and the end of the year throughout the Americas.

"We do expect there to be some spot shortages," said Reggie Fils-Amie, executive vice president for marketing at Nintendo of America. "We know quite frankly if we had double that we could sell all of it."

Nintendo has already said it will fall well short of demand in Japan as well, where the DS launches early next month.

Nintendo defeated all comers over the last 15 years who tried to challenge it in the handheld market, even well-known names like Sega (the Game Gear), Atari (Lynx) and NEC (the TurboGrafx Express).

But in early 2005 Nintendo will face its most formidable challenge yet, Sony Corp.'s PlayStation Portable, or PSP. Designed to play movies and music as well as games, the PSP is Sony's bet it can take over the handheld market the way the PlayStation did for home consoles almost 10 years ago.

"When PSP comes we'll deal with it," Fils-Amie said succinctly. "Our focus right now is maximizing the penetration for DS."

With expectations that the PSP will sell for around the same price as the $149.99 DS, and with much the same potential audience, many think the two will end up competing head-to-head for some buyers once the PSP debuts in March.

"My sense is that they are different markets but not to the extent that either company would have you believe," EGM's MacDonald said.

Despite the added expense of new development for a new platform, publishers embraced the DS. There will be eight titles available at launch, up to 12 by the end of the year and as many as 25 by the end of the first quarter of 2005.

Analysts said the most likely beneficiaries of the DS launch in terms of software sales were the third parties who made aggressive commitments to support the the device from the outset, like Electronic Arts Inc. and Activision Inc.

Nintendo has relatively fewer of its own games at the launch compared to outside publishers, something of a reversal from its past hardware releases.

"They're really trying to embrace third-party publishers and skew older with this launch," said P.J. McNealy, an analyst at American Technology Research.

A Retro Revolution Hits Holidays as Atari Introduces 'Atari Flashback Classic Game Console'

Harkening back to the nascent days of the video game explosion, Atari, Inc. announced that its Atari Flashback Classic Game Console will hit store shelves the week of November 22nd. A new retro-style, stand-alone console unit configured with 20 classic Atari games, Atari Flashback includes Asteroids, Centipede, Breakout and Atari's previously unreleased thriller, Saboteur. Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Atari 7800, the Atari Flashback will be available exclusively at Wal-Mart, Target, Best Buy and Gamestop for a suggested price of $44.95.

"Atari is synonymous with video games and the Atari Flashback faithfully brings back the sights, sounds and addictive play of games that started an entertainment revolution," said Wim Stocks, Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Atari. "Retro gaming offers a unique blend of nostalgia for older fans and coolness for younger fans, making Atari Flashback this season's perfect holiday gift. The bottom line is classics never go out of style."

Resembling a modified replica of the Atari 7800 console, the Atari Flashback plugs directly into the TV via composite (RCA) cables, includes two joysticks and is the only retro-console to feature multiplayer gaming, with such notoriously challenging head-to-head games such as Canyon Bomber, Asteroids, Centipede, Desert Falcon and Sprintmaster.

In addition to featuring 20 classic games that defined a generation of

players, Atari Flashback includes one exclusive from-the-vault classic, Atari’s Saboteur. Never before released, Atari’s Saboteur follows the adventures of the noble Hotot in his quest to sabotage the production of the evil Master Robot’s warhead and save his galaxy from total annihilation.

The complete list of games found in Atari Flashback includes:

* Adventure
* Air Sea Battle
* Asteroids
* Battlezone
* Breakout
* Canyon Bomber
* Centipede
* Crystal Castles
* Desert Falcon
* Food Fight
* Gravitar
* Haunted House
* Millipede
* Planet Smashers
* Saboteur
* Sky Diver
* Solaris
* Sprintmaster
* Warlords
* Yar’s Revenge

Need for Speed Underground 2 Ships

Electronic Arts today announced that Need for Speed Underground 2 has shipped to retail stores nationwide for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, Xbox video game system from Microsoft, Nintendo GameCube, Game Boy Advance and PC. The sequel to last year’s run-away hit which sold over 8 million copies worldwide, Need for Speed Underground 2 features a massive, free-roaming game world where players can immerse themselves in the tuner culture as they race through more than 125 miles of open road.

True to the tuner culture, players can enhance their rides with an unprecedented 70 billion possible car combinations, including deep performance tuning, to create the ultimate street racer. Players can cruise through the streets in style with hundreds of new visual upgrades such as hydraulics, spinner rims, and scissor doors and hoods. As gamers explore the city’s five distinct interconnected neighborhoods, they’ll encounter rival street races that can erupt any time, anywhere, or put their skills to the test by entering the hottest competitions in town. With new gameplay modes including StreetX, Downhill Drift and the Underground Racing League, as well as online play for Xbox Live, the PlayStation 2 console and PC, players will need more than just style to prevail.

Upon entering the world of the underground, players will instantly be introduced to Brooke Burke, former-host of E! Entertainment Television’s popular travel series, "Wild On." Burke plays the streetwise organizer of an elite underground circuit as she guides players to become the top racers on the streets.

On the way to racing glory, Need for Speed Underground 2 players will be able to hear Snoop Dogg's unforgettable remix of The Doors' legendary rock song, "Riders On The Storm" - an exclusive track that can only be heard in the game. The beats keep pumping as players turn up the music with 27 hit songs from renowned artists such as Chingy, Mudvayne, Terror Squad, Xzibit and Queens of the Stone Age.

Developed in Vancouver, B.C. by EA Canada, Need for Speed Underground 2 is rated "E" for Everyone by the ESRB and has an MSRP of $49.99 for PlayStation 2, Xbox and Nintendo GameCube, $39.99 for PC and $29.99 for Game Boy Advance. For more information about the game, please visit http://www.needforspeed.com.

Microsoft Cracks Down on Xbox Changes

In the days before Microsoft Corp. released the hotly anticipated Halo 2 video game for the Xbox game console, some gamers noticed a sudden spike in the number of people being kicked off the company's online game service. That was no coincidence.

With Halo 2 expected to entice a new batch of users to the Xbox Live online gaming community, Microsoft says it got tougher with people suspected of making unauthorized modifications to their Xboxes.

Gamers who modify Xboxes usually do so either to be able to cheat on games or use pirated copies, although some also have made changes so they can use the Xbox for other functions, from running Linux to playing music.

Cameron Ferroni, general manager of the Xbox software platform, says Microsoft is not interested in suing individual users. But the company does want to banish scofflaws from its online service, Xbox Live.

It's hard to know how many of Microsoft's 15.5 million Xbox users have modified their game consoles, although the percentage is believed to be small.

Microsoft has a unique glimpse into the approximately 1 million Xbox Live users' computers because, by virtue of signing up for the service, users agree to let Microsoft gather certain information from their machines.

Ferroni declined to go into specifics on how the company can check Xbox Live users' machines for suspected modifications. He said Microsoft has no way of checking whether players who don't use Xbox Live have modified their machines.

Neil Smith, an intellectual property lawyer with Howard Rice in San Francisco, said there's little legal risk in modifying a game system for relatively benign personal use, such as making players invulnerable.

But it is important to Microsoft to prevent such cheating on Xbox Live, where multiple players can take part in games. Ferroni said the goal is to make sure there's a level playing field.

Smith, who has represented several video game companies, said users face greater legal risk - and companies have more leverage - if a person is modifying the system to play pirated or other unauthorized games. That's

especially true if the person is altering their system’s security codes or settings.

Microsoft says it has focused its legal efforts on those it believes are manufacturing pirated games or mass-producing Xbox modifications.

Smith said the legality of modifying other people’s technology remains hazy.

Other technology companies have grappled with how much can be done to their systems without their consent.

Earlier this year, Seattle-based RealNetworks caused a stir when it said it had developed software that allows songs purchased from its online music store to transfer to Apple Computer Inc.’s iPod by skirting internal copy protections.

Apple, which has closely guarded control of its music player, responded by accusing RealNetworks of adopting "the tactics and ethics of a hacker."

Other video game consoles don’t seem to face as much tinkering for the sake of piracy as the Xbox, said PJ McNealy, an analyst with American Technology Research.

Sony Corp.’s PlayStation 2 doesn’t have as complex antipiracy measures, he said, and Nintendo Co.’s cartridge-based games are much more difficult to pirate than the CDs that Microsoft and Sony use.

Analyst Rob Enderle said Microsoft’s Xbox is also much more vulnerable to tinkering because its popular built-in hard drive more closely mimics a regular personal computer, whereas the other systems rely on less familiar technology.

"The very thing that made the Xbox a rapid success is also what made it easy to hack," Enderle said.

McNealy thinks Microsoft is right to go after those who are playing pirated games, but he thinks Microsoft might be flattered by some of the other homemade tweaks.

"To modify it to the umpteenth degree is simply a byproduct of the geek culture of the hardcore gamer," McNealy said. "It should be good news for Microsoft that there’s that much demand (for Xbox) that people want to spend so much time figuring that stuff out."

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Moratorium on Web Tax Advances

Congress yesterday cleared the way to keep access to the Internet largely free from taxes for the next three years, breaking a year-long deadlock.

In a compromise, the Senate tweaked provisions of a bill it passed in April that reflected concerns by state and local governments that they could lose billions of dollars in tax revenue as more and more voice communication migrates to the Internet.

The House, which had approved a broader, permanent tax ban last year, agreed to replace it with the Senate version, according to a spokesman for Rep. Christopher Cox (news, bio, voting record) (R-Calif.), one of the House bill's sponsors. He said he expects the House to vote on the measure today, and the White House has already signaled that President Bush would sign it.

"The Internet makes American workers and companies more productive," Cox said in a statement. "By protecting consumers from new taxes, the new law will keep Internet access affordable."

The often-stormy dispute pitted some lawmakers, including former governors from cash-strapped states, against others who favor less taxes across the board. Many industry groups supported the permanent ban, arguing that the certainty of no taxes would encourage electronic commerce and spur more people to switch to high-speed Internet service, which is more expensive than dial-up telephone access.

Most consumers already are free from such taxes as a result of a three-year moratorium that expired last year. The law meant that states could not impose taxes on the monthly fees charged by Internet service providers, a tax that is often passed on to consumers.

But the original law was written before there was widespread use of high-speed Internet access over telephone lines, known as DSL. As a result, several states, which have authority to regulate and tax telecommunications services, were collecting taxes on DSL service.

Similar taxes were not being collected for Internet service over cable lines, which is not classified as a telecommunications service by the federal government. And some states had begun collecting taxes before the original moratorium took effect and had been allowed to continue.

The new bill would ban Internet access taxes, regardless of technology, until November 2007. It also ensures that products bought over the Internet cannot be taxed by more than one state and prohibits discriminatory taxes that treat Internet purchases differently than other types of sales.

But state officials, whose concerns were spearheaded by Sens. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Thomas R. Carper (D-Del.), won important concessions that softened what they said would amount to a giveaway to telecommunications and Internet companies.

States that collect Internet taxes have up to three years to end their collections. The changes made yesterday gave Wisconsin and Texas more time to end their tax regimes, satisfying some House members from those states, including Judiciary Committee Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. (R-Wis.).

The revisions also make clear that any service that results in a telephone call, regardless of the technology behind it, can continue to be taxed.

Some states were concerned that phone companies might try to argue that

their regular phone services would be exempt from taxes because the calls spend part of their trip on networks that increasingly use the Internet.

Similarly, calls made via a technology known as voice-over-Internet protocol (VoIP), which originate on high-speed Internet networks, can be taxed.

Among other things, state officials argued that they rely on telecommunications taxes to help fund consumer-protection enforcement and to ensure that the poor have access to basic phone service.

By some estimates, states could have lost as much as $10 billion a year if all telephone service were exempt from taxes.

"More than a year ago, the Senate was prepared to pass legislation that would have done irrevocable harm to state and local governments," Carper, a former governor, said in a statement. "But the compromise we worked out will do minimal harm to states, while also protecting consumers from taxes on their monthly Internet bills."

Alexander, also a former governor, said the compromise balanced states' rights with the need to foster free markets.

Sen. George Allen (news, bio, voting record) (R-Va.), who along with Sen. Ron Wyden (news, bio, voting record) (D-Ore.) had pushed for a permanent and more extensive ban on taxes, also said he is pleased by the compromise.

"Today, we have made sure that the avaricious tax commissars from every county, city and state in America cannot continue conniving new ways to tax the Internet and the people who use it," he said in a statement.

Wyden said the result ensures a brighter, more secure future for the Internet and Web commerce.

Congress Blocks Net Connection Taxation

Congress acted Friday to block state and local governments from taxing connections that link consumers to the Internet for the next three years.

"Enacting this legislation is a big win for the majority of American Internet users," House Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis., said as the House passed the bill by voice vote Friday and sent it to the president for his signature.

The Senate made adjustments to the bill this week that freed the tax prohibition from a yearlong stalemate and pushed it toward passage.

The bill blocks taxation of all types of Internet connections, from traditional dial-up services to high-speed broadband lines.

States that had started taxing Internet access before the first ban, enacted in 1998, can continue collecting those fees. One exception is Wisconsin, which must drop its taxes in 2006 at Sensenbrenner's insistence.

The original ban didn't envision the invention of speedy DSL lines, and the law would require the few states that now tax those connections to phase out their levies.

"We have slammed the door on the people who want to stick it to DSL," Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., told reporters after the House passed the bill.

An earlier ban lapsed more than a year ago while lawmakers struggled to rewrite the regulations to include new technologies while ensuring that it wouldn't exempt all telecommunications activities from taxation.

The bill also blocks multiple state and local taxes from being imposed on merchandise purchased over the Internet, and taxes "aimed at the online world that don't exist in the offline world," said Rep. Chris Cox, R-Calif.

"You can't have an e-mail tax," he said.

The House voted last year to permanently ban taxes on Internet access, but it could not find enough support in the Senate despite a strong push from the telecommunications industry. Proponents said they won't wait until the temporary ban runs out in 2007 to start trying again.

National Governors Association Executive Director Raymond C. Scheppach said in a statement that technologies may be changing too rapidly to enact a permanent law.

"Congress, consumers and the private sector should be able to revisit the issue and adjust to emerging technologies and market realities," he said. "It just makes sense."

The bill has no effect on an emerging Internet technology that some states want to tax as a traditional telecommunications service - Voice Over Internet Protocol or VOIP. The service lets consumers use Internet technology like telephones.

Adobe Readies Acrobat 7.0

Adobe Systems by the end of the year will release version 7.0 of its Acrobat products, including a new free Acrobat Reader that now includes reviewing capabilities, the company plans to announce this week.

With the updates, San Jose, California-based Adobe is underscoring its focus on workgroups and document management. The client products all tie in to the company's Intelligent Document Platform, a set of elements Adobe wants to use to make PDF (Portable Document Format) with XML (Extensible Markup Language) additions a common way to get data in and out of enterprise systems.

Acrobat 7.0 Professional users can create PDF files and allow those to be reviewed and commented on by Acrobat Reader 7.0 users. The reader features a new reviewing toolbar that can be enabled when the PDF file is created in Acrobat Professional, according to Adobe.

Included with Acrobat 7.0 Professional is Adobe LiveCycle Designer, a tool to design PDF forms that work with back-end enterprise systems using XML. These special forms allow organizations to automatically process data sent in PDF forms, so there's no need to re-enter the information into their own back-end systems.

Adobe's Intelligent Document Platform goes up against Microsoft's XML plans

for Office and InfoPath and competes with products from several smaller vendors.

Catering to its traditional audience of design professionals, Adobe has enhanced the Acrobat applications to display PDF files that include "live" 3D computer-aided design (CAD) content as opposed to a static 3D picture, the company says.

The high-end Acrobat 7.0 Professional is targeted at technical and creative professionals and is priced at $449. An upgrade from selected preceding versions is available for $159.

Acrobat 7.0 Standard is aimed at business professionals and costs $299, with the upgrade version priced at $99. Acrobat Elements is available only through Adobe's volume licensing program as a PDF creation tool and costs $39 per seat for a 100-seat license.

Acrobat 7.0 Standard and Professional will be available in English, French, German and Japanese by the end of the year for Microsoft's Windows and Apple Computer's Macintosh operating systems. Acrobat Reader 7.0 will be available for Windows and Mac by year's end and next year for Linux, Pocket PC, Palm OS, and Symbian, according to Adobe.

Sun to Give Out Operating System for Free

After investing roughly $500 million and spending years of development time on its next-generation operating system, Sun Microsystems Inc. on Monday will announce an aggressive price for the software - free.

Sun, which has never completely rebounded from the tech collapse in 2001, hopes the no-cost of Solaris 10 will not only attract customers but also expand the number of developers who write programs that work on computers running the operating system.

The result, Sun believes, will be renewed demand for its servers and services. The company also will charge subscription fees for Solaris support and service programs that are typically sought by the businesses and organizations that Sun targets.

"Hewlett Packard sells a printer at a low price and makes a lot of money on printer cartridges. Gillette gives you the razor and makes a lot of money on the blades," said Scott McNealy, Sun's chief executive. "There are different ways to drive market penetration."

Solaris 10 will be unveiled Monday at an event in San Jose, though it won't be formally released until the end of January. It will work on more than 270 computer platforms running on chips from Sun, Intel Corp. or Advanced Micro Devices Inc.

The price of earlier versions of Solaris typically ran between hundreds and thousands of dollars - depending on the system that was being run by the software, said Tom Goguen, Sun's vice president of operating platforms.

Sun also has promised make the underlying code of Solaris available under an open-source license, though the details have not been released. With access to the code, Solaris users will be able to take advantage of its features when developing their own software and systems.

The move stands in contrast to Microsoft Corp.’s Windows and other proprietary operating systems in which the blueprints are released only to select outsiders, if any.

And, depending on the final license, it could make Solaris more competitive with open-source operating systems like Linux and distributors such as Red Hat Inc.

"When we open source, the one advantage we thought Red Hat had is gone. Then we both have an advantage with respect to Microsoft," McNealy said. "(Sun has) a worldwide service and support organization, which we think is way better than either company in the enterprise."

Solaris also will run programs written for the Linux operating system without having to make any changes.

Though Sun also sells lower-end systems that run Linux, it believes Solaris is a better value proposition. To strengthen its case, Solaris 10 will include security features that in the past were only part of a trusted version sold strictly to government agencies and the military.

Sun, a star of the late 1990s tech boom, fell on hard times as corporate spending shrunk and rivals like IBM Corp. and Hewlett-Packard Co. started offering machines with less expensive hardware and software.

The Santa Clara-based company has been trying to return to solid footing for years, and McNealy said Solaris 10 is an important part of the company’s transformation.

"It’s kind of the tent pole - it just kind of holds up the whole deal," he said.

Last month, Sun announced its second consecutive quarter of revenue growth, though profits remain elusive. McNealy believes the company he co-founded in 1982 has already turned the corner, though the financials have yet to show it.

"There’s always a lag with companies our size," McNealy said. "And that’s assuming we’re not making dumb mistakes right now that I don’t know about."

Firefox Leaves No Reason to Endure Internet Explorer

Internet Explorer, you’re fired.

That should have been said a long time ago. After Microsoft cemented a monopoly of the Web-browser market, it let Internet Explorer go stale, parceling out ho-hum updates that neglected vulnerabilities routinely exploited by hostile Web sites. Not until August’s Windows XP Service Pack 2 update did (some) users get any real relief.

And yet people found reasons to stick with IE - alternative browsers cost money, were too slow, too complicated, or didn’t work with enough Web sites.

No more. Tuesday, the answer to IE arrived: a safe, free, fast, simple and compatible browser called Mozilla Firefox.

Firefox (available for Win 98 or newer, Mac OS X and Linux at www.mozilla.org) is an unlikely rival, developed by a small nonprofit group with extensive volunteer help. Its code dates to Netscape and its open-source successor, Mozilla, but in the two years since Firefox debuted as a minimal, browser-only offshoot of those sprawling suites, it has grown into a remarkable product.

Firefox displays an elegant simplicity within and without. Its toolbar presents only the basic browsing commands: back, forward, reload, stop, home. Its Options screen consists of five simple categories of settings - most of which don't need adjusting, since the defaults actually make sense.

One in particular should delight many long-suffering Web users: Firefox blocks pop-up ads automatically.

But Firefox's security goes deeper than that. It doesn't support Microsoft's dangerous ActiveX software, which gives a Web site the run of your computer. It omits IE's extensive hooks into the rest of Windows, which can turn a mishap into a systemwide meltdown.

Firefox resists "phishing" scams, in which con artists lure users into entering personal info on fake Web pages, by making it easier to tell good sites from bad. When you land on an encrypted page - almost no phishing sites provide this protection - Firefox advertises that status by highlighting the address bar in yellow. It also lists that page's domain name on the status bar; if that doesn't match what you see in the address bar, you're probably on a phishing site.

To keep Firefox current with any security fixes, the browser is designed to check for updates automatically.

A "Find" bar at the bottom of Firefox's window lets you search for words on a page without blocking your view of the page itself; as you type a query, the first matching item is highlighted in green. "Find Next" and "Find Previous" buttons jump to other matches, and a "Highlight" button paints all of them in yellow.

For searches across the entire Web, a box at the top right provides a shortcut to Google queries, and a menu lists five other sites, including Yahoo, Amazon and eBay. Downloadable plug-ins offer access to such resources as the Internet Movie Database.

What if that Google search yields four interesting sites? Hold down the Control key as you click each link, and they will open behind separate tabs in your existing window. This tabbed browsing - a feature shared with almost all non-IE browsers - is far more efficient and far less cluttered than the old one-page-per-window approach.

Busy readers can also use Firefox's built-in RSS (Really Simple Syndication) newsreader to fetch updates from Web sites that publish their content using this standard. This "Live Bookmarks" feature lacks the flexibility of a stand-alone newsreader, but it's also simpler.

Web addicts can customize Firefox to no end with browser extensions that add functions and themes that alter its looks. Find the Options window's settings too limiting? Type "about: config" into the address bar and you'll see about 600 preferences to tweak.

I've used Firefox as my default browser since February, and in that time

I've found few Web sites that don't look right in it. Most of the time, it's the Web site's fault: Microsoft's MSN Video blocks all non-IE browsers, while SideStep's airfare-search tool employs ActiveX (an ActiveX-free version is in the works). In these rare cases, I will fire up IE - it's not like I can uninstall it - or, more often, vote with my mouse and move on to another site.

Switching from IE to Firefox is nearly painless. Download a 4.7-megabyte installer, run it, and let it import your existing IE data. Your plug-ins, bookmarks, browsing history and even cookies should transfer over (IE's home page and any saved passwords should be imported, but were not in my tests); you can then pick up in Firefox exactly where you left off in IE.

I think anybody using Internet Explorer should switch to Firefox today. Seriously. Even if you've loaded every IE security update, Firefox will give you a faster, more useful view of the Web. If you haven't - or if you use a pre-XP version of Windows ineligible for Service Pack 2's security fixes - it would be lunacy to stick with IE.

(If you're using Mac OS X or Linux, there's no such urgency; Apple's Safari, for example, is a fine browser in its own right and offers a few conveniences that Firefox leaves out.)

Firefox's story doesn't end with this 1.0 version. Some upgrades, such as a rewrite of its awkward bookmarks-management interface, are waiting for later releases. But the beauty of an open-source product like this is that you can participate in its evolution. Firefox's code is open for anybody to inspect and improve; you can browse a database of bugs (bugzilla.mozilla.org) and vote on what you want to see changed next.

All of these advantages may still not suffice to knock off IE anytime soon. But Firefox's development won't grind to a halt if it doesn't suit some company's marketing plans. Can you say that about IE?

McAfee Debuts Enterprise Anti-Spyware Tool

Security software firm McAfee has unveiled a new module for its virus-scan engine that is designed to help businesses fight spyware.

The McAfee Anti-Spyware Enterprise Edition module is the industry's first anti-spyware tool to offer centralized management, according to the company.

The module should find success in a marketplace that is in need of such tools, Yankee Group analyst Eric Ogren told NewsFactor.

"It's not surprising that anti-virus software companies would start targeting spyware," he said. "It's a scourge."

McAfee's module uses real-time scanning to identify and eliminate malicious applications, including entries in the Windows Registry and other areas where spyware programs reside.

The tool plugs into McAfee VirusScan Enterprise 7.1 and 8.0i to add a layer of protection against spyware, keystroke loggers, adware and dialers.

Since the software is tightly integrated, I.T. administrators can manage

both products as a single agent.

The module is managed centrally under a single console with the company's ePolicy Orchestrator for the enterprise and ProtectionPilot for small to mid-size businesses.

Spyware has become more than a consumer nuisance, according to recent reports. An IDC survey of 600 North American organizations, for example, showed that spyware was a serious concern.

Some companies ranked it ahead of spam, hackers and cyberterrorism as a threat to network security.

As spyware proliferates, companies can expect to see more software controls, Ogren noted.

"The industry is starting to realize the seriousness of the threat," he said, adding that it would have been preferable to have software companies working on the problem earlier.

"At this point, they have to catch up, but at least they're recognizing the vulnerability," said Ogren.

Yahoo, EarthLink to Test New Anti-Spam System

EarthLink Inc. and Yahoo Inc. said on Monday they would begin tests of a new anti-spam technology that encodes digital signatures into customers' e-mail as a way to separate legitimate messages from unwanted spam.

Developed by Yahoo, the technology is one of several emerging standards that seeks to flush out fake addresses used by spammers to slip through content filters. It would be invisible to regular Internet users.

Yahoo's DomainKeys embeds outgoing messages with an encrypted digital signature matched to a signature on the server computer that sends the message.

Internet providers could check the signatures on incoming messages and block those that do not match up, though they are more likely to use it alongside other anti-spam technologies.

Internet experts generally agree that DomainKeys provides a higher level of security than a Microsoft Corp.-backed standard known as SenderID, but is more difficult to implement and requires about 10 percent more computing power to process.

Google Inc.'s Gmail and Indian Internet provider Sify have already begun using DomainKeys.

Yahoo Mail Deploys Sender Authentication

Yahoo Mail will begin using a form of sender authentication technology called "DomainKeys" to protect users from phishing and other online scams, the company announced.

The software, which is based on cryptographic technology, validates the true origin of e-mail messages, the company explains.

Yahoo rolled out the sender authentication technology along with several other upgrades to its mail service, including advanced search capabilities, an increase in free storage to 250 megabytes, and easier address book-transfer and address-notification tools.

Sender authentication technology has been a topical issue lately, given the proliferation of spam and the ever-increasing sophistication of phishing ruses. The challenge with DomainKeys - as well as other technologies offered by such vendors as Microsoft - is the lack of consistent standards.

"There is a lot of dueling technology out there," says Gregg Mastoras, senior security analyst for Sophos.

"In general, we applaud any provider that uses this technology," he tells NewsFactor. "But until some standard is reached, companies like Yahoo will be forced to adopt multiple technologies or pick one."

Yahoo developed the DomainKeys technology and is providing it royalty-free to the industry.

A sending system uses a private key to generate a signature and inserts the signature in the e-mail header, according to the company. The receiving e-mail system uses the public key, published in the Domain Name System, to verify the signature of the e-mail.

Even with a standards agreement in place, sender authentication technology will make only a slight dent in spam - despite claims to the contrary.

There is just too much spam out there, Mastoras says. "Also, some spammers have gotten on the so-called ’reputation databases.’"

Phishing is another matter entirely. "A broadly accepted sender authentication standard - and the widespread deployment of the technology - will make a serious dent in phishing scams," Mastoras predicts.

That is because most people do business online with a very small universe of providers, and the system will be able to recognize these addresses.

Spamming the Big Fish

Most business people with a long-standing e-mail address know the pain of spam. But Bill Gates may have all of us whiners beat.

According to Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer, Gates receives four million e-mails per day. The vast majority of those are spam, Ballmer said.

Ballmer argued that Bill Gates is the most spammed person in the world during a talk he gave to the Singapore Government Leader’s forum. He did not say who ranked next on the list, but said that Gates has a staff of several people dedicated to nothing but sorting through his e-mail.

Wherever Ballmer himself ranks in the not-so-privileged list of top spam recipients, he claims to receive only about 10 junk e-mail messages in his

inbox every day. That low number, he says, is due to the effectiveness of Microsoft’s anti-spam technology.

What Ballmer did not mention is the discord among those in the software world about exactly what should be done to combat spam. Microsoft has been active in efforts to combat junk e-mail - especially as relates to its Web-based e-mail system, MSN Hotmail - but those efforts seem to have stalled.

In September, the Internet body responsible for developing general proposals into working standards for the Web community shut down the working group that was trying to make sense of sender identification parameters to fight spam.

Part of the problem, Meta Group’s Matt Cain told NewsFactor, is that there is contention between open-source community participants and Microsoft over patents it holds on anti-spam technology.

Group members had expressed increasing concern over Microsoft’s apparent ownership of some of the technology on which the "Sender ID" portion of the standards was to be based.

"Even though Microsoft didn’t want any royalties on its apparent patents," he said, "just the fact that there are patents out there sticks in the open-source craw," he explained.

New Sober Worm on the Loose

A new version of the Sober worm appeared on the Internet early Friday morning and already it is having quite a bit of success infecting users in Europe through the use of social engineering.

Sober.J arrives in an e-mail message that appears to be a returned-mail error message, telling the user that an e-mail sent earlier has bounced. The message typically contains a .zip, .bat, .com, .scr or .pif attachment and a body text that is some variation on the following:

```
This mail was generated automatically.More info about --YAHOO-- under:
http://www.yahoo.com-------
Occured_Errors:178.218.194.86_
does_not_like_recipient.# 185:
MAILBOX NOT FOUND# 144:
Giving_up_on_178.218.194.86.# 533:
This_account_has_been_discontinued_
[#413].End-------
The original mail is attached.Auto_Mail.System: [yahoo]
```

The subject line of the e-mail message varies, but often indicates that the message is a warning about a bounced e-mail, such as:

```
Delivery_failure_notice
Faulty_mail delivery
Mail_delivery failed
```

When the recipient opens the attachment, the worm displays a fake error message saying that a portion of the WinZip software is missing. The worm

then copies itself to the Windows System folder in two separate locations, using filenames that it constructs dynamically from a small set of common strings, including sys, spool, crypt, host, dir, service, win, run, 32, data, and a few others, according to an analysis by McAfee Inc., based in Santa Clara, Calif. The filename always ends in "exe."

Sober.J then creates several registry keys to ensure it will be run on startup and searches for e-mail addresses on the infected machine. It then begins mailing itself to all of the addresses it finds.

AOL Developing File-Backup Service

America Online is developing a new service that will let its members back up files from their PCs onto AOL data centers, so members can recover files either deleted accidentally or lost due to a hard-drive failure, an AOL executive says.

"The concept is for users to very easily, either automatically or with one click, back up files from their hard drives to the AOL data centers," says Kerry Parkins, director of product marketing at AOL.

The backup feature is an interesting one to add to the AOL online service, but its adoption will depend heavily on AOL’s making a case to members about its benefits, since PC users in general aren’t in the habit of backing up their hard-drive data, says David Card, a Jupiter Research analyst.

The file backup will be a premium service with tiered monthly pricing based on storage levels: $3 for 100MB, $5 for 250MB, or $10 for 1GB, on top of the monthly AOL fee, according to information gathered from an AOL brochure and from AOL’s online service, where the service is currently being beta-tested. Members can access it by typing keyword: File Backup.

Files stored at the AOL data centers will be encrypted, and access to them will be controlled via a password and an answer to a security question set up by the user, according to the AOL information. Users will determine when and how frequently AOL performs the automated backups; users need only to make sure that their computers are turned on and connected to the Internet at the scheduled backup times, according to the AOL information.

The files will be stored on two separate AOL data centers for added redundancy. If users need to retrieve files from the AOL data centers, they will be able to do it either from the proprietary AOL online service interface or from any computer’s Web browser, pointed to AOL.com, according to the AOL information.

The idea for the service came from an AOL survey that found about half of its members have experienced loss of data from their hard drives that they hadn’t backed up, according to the AOL information.

Though users will be able to back up any file they want, the service isn’t designed to restore an entire hard drive including program files; rather, the service is for storing copies of files that are important and hard to replace, according to the AOL information.

The company doesn’t yet have a timetable for when the service will be available, AOL’s Parkins says.

On Thursday, AOL launched the latest version of its online service, AOL 9 Security Edition, which includes a variety of new and enhanced online security tools.

Microsoft Targets Older People for Web Via TV

For people trying to get their aging parents on the Web so they can read e-mail and get digital photos of the family, Microsoft Corp. has a message: Don’t give up.

The hassle of buying, installing and learning how to operate a personal computer remains a daunting task for a generation more comfortable sitting in front of a television set instead of a monitor, despite software and hardware advances that make it easier than ever to get online.

But now Microsoft, the largest player in the market, is using those advances to zero in on an age group that wants to surf the Web and is estimated at 40 million strong.

It’s all part of a way for the Redmond, Washington-based company to extend its software business beyond Windows for the desktop and into living rooms and pocket devices.

MSN TV 2, the latest version of an interactive platform once known as WebTV, launched last month as part of a renewed effort to spread the use of Microsoft’s software for browsing the Web, reading news and e-mail, and accessing digital content.

"Our average user is 57 years old," said Andy Sheldon, senior director of product marketing for MSN TV. "These people are getting to the age where they don’t want to deal with complicated ways of connecting to the Web."

Besides older people, Sheldon said Microsoft is targeting all first-time Web users, particularly in developing economies where the Internet is out of many people’s reach because of the cost of a PC.

MSN TV, the second generation of the product that launched after Microsoft bought WebTV in 1997, costs $200 for a set-top box, remote and wireless keyboard.

Users must also sign up for a subscription. Costs are $22 per month or $200 per year for dial-up access and $10 per month or $100 per year for those with existing high-speed broadband connections.

Included in the plan packages are e-mail and instant messaging accounts, and for those with faster Internet access, access to 200 radio stations and video clips. Viewers can also browse Web pages or even digital photos stored on memory cards.

Behind Microsoft’s push to capture the often overlooked older segment of the population is the promise of carving out a chunk of the interactive television market, estimated to grow to $2.3 billion in 2007.

Besides MSN TV, that figure also includes advanced cable services, such as the ability to store TV shows and movies on set-top boxes that also double as digital video recorders.

"Microsoft has pursued this market for some time with only marginal success," Jupiter Research analyst Joe Wilcox said in a report.

Indeed, Microsoft invested billions in cable operators during the late 1990s, only to take massive paper losses when the value of those companies fell after the Internet bubble burst.

The goal then, as the company described it, was convergence, when television and computer technology would merge to become a comprehensive information platform.

MSN TV is not the only route Microsoft is taking toward that goal. It now has an edition of Windows for PCs meant to be connected to TVs in the living room and also is making inroads in the set-top market, where its software will be used in digital recorder-enabled set-top boxes by cable operator Comcast Corp.

Interestingly, though, MSN TV’s biggest competition may be older PCs. Sheldon, the product marketing executive, said these machines are increasingly being refurbished and given to older family members so they can connect to the Internet.

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